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TEN DAYS IN EAST TIMOR

and the case for Talks

by

David Scott, AO

Poland, Baltic States, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, the States of the Soviet Union, Namibia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Western Sahara, South Africa, the Middle East, now Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka and Bougainville

East Timor ... if not now, when?

EAST TIMOR TALKS CAMPAIGN
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David Scott AO was in Dili in December 1975 representing ACFOA (Australia Council for Overseas Aid). He was in the last party of twelve journalists and medical workers to be evacuated by the RAAF five days before the full-scale Indonesian assault on December 7.

He was the founding Director of Community Aid Abroad, a former Director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence and recently retired as Chairman of Victoria's Land Conservation Council. He visited East Timor from July 22 to August 2, 1994.

East Timor Talks Campaign

The East Timor Talks Campaign is an independent, community-based initiative established to promote a resolution of the East Timor conflict through dialogue under UN auspices involving all parties to the conflict.

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TEN DAYS IN EAST TIMOR AND THE CASE FOR TALKS

Dili could be a festival town on the Cote d'Azure. The dry, rugged mountains cut by deep gullies are a dramatic backdrop to the white Portuguese colonial buildings. From the sea, the orange roof of the Governor's new white mansion stands out to the west. Next the dry stony bed of the Comoro River falls steeply from the mountains. The airport tower and the white lighthouse are landmarks at the western end of the harbour. A narrow channel through coral reefs leads to the wharf.

The esplanade curves around the bay, passing the beautiful Motael Church with arched windows and square, red roofed tower, then along by the cloistered buildings of the Governor's offices, framed by huge banyan trees on the promenade, past the Hotel Turismo to the white sand beach at the foot of a towering peak.

The Mediterranean illusion ends at the wharf gate. Public buildings are festooned with red and white bunting and decorated with large, square coloured flags. Banners hang across the streets urging people to celebrate *Integrasi*, the Indonesian declaration on July 17, 1976 that followed a mock ceremony of chosen local chiefs who petitioned Indonesia to integrate East Timor.

In 1994, the people of East Timor are not celebrating. In other parts of Indonesia there are welcoming smiles for strangers... people talk freely and with animation. In Dili, those who are East Timorese look down or away. Conversations with foreigners lead to questioning. One can easily be taken away blindfolded by the military or the police. People speak in low voices or whispers in shops, offices, taxis, cafes and churches.

In a large office with several desks, the eyes of the man speaking to me never ceased sweeping the room and watching who was passing the doorway. People have been made to believe they are always under surveillance. It is not known how many people are held in the building with boarded up windows opposite the Court House or in other detention centres. There is *habeas corpus* provision in Indonesia but it does not operate in Dili where there is only one lawyer. On August 10, Amnesty released a list of names of 22 people, arrested after incidents on July 10 and 14, whose whereabouts are still unknown. Many, it is alleged, have been tortured.

Except for new buildings, Dili is dilapidated. Pavements are full of holes and there are few drain covers. Rusting landing craft still litter the beach. Pigs grub along the foreshore.

A Dili veteran pointed out 15 informers in a 45 minute walk. Most were on motor bikes or in vehicles. Some are East Timorese whose spirits have been broken by years of imprisonment, hunger and torture. Money is paid for information. Also identified were people who had lost relatives and others who had been 'in the forest.'

On Saturday, the gates and doors of the Cathedral were locked, a response to incidents in the previous week that created high religious tension. On Sunday morning, some 1,000 people walked quietly into the Cathedral for the 7am Mass in the Tetum language. They shared worship and singing with deep feeling but then dispersed quietly without the warm and friendly after-worship gatherings one experiences elsewhere. Few people spoke to one another and noone to a stranger.

Taxis stop running at 7 pm in Dili and few people go out after dark. Inward and outward mail is often opened and often fails to reach its destination. Fax is the more reliable method of communication. Visitors are warned to be careful what they talk about in taxis.

International Red Cross representatives visit prisoners but there are no foreign consulates or resident journalists.

Visiting correspondents, UN and other international officials are kept under surveillance and away from East Timorese. The BBC correspondent was refused permission to interview local people while I was there. A student from Perth was told to leave within 24 hours. When he asked why, he was told "because of the disreputable company you keep in Perth". At the Hotel Turismo the room of a guest was clumsily searched and a book taken. The Intel (Indonesian Intelligence) man described by British author Norman Lewis in 1992 in *Empire of the East* is still on duty.

Tapes are a way of communicating with the outside world. Only one shop in Dili sells tape recorders and the names of purchasers are recorded. Photocopy facilities too are under surveillance. Local East Timorese public figures who express any criticism often receive physical threats and are warned of court action or deportation.

There is no need for listening devices in every room and office. People are controlled by being made to believe they are under constant surveillance as in the communist states. When I made the comparison to a person who had lived in Warsaw in the 1970s, the response was that Dili was far worse. "In Warsaw there was no sense of choking oppression, the security apparatus did not monitor an individual's life as it does in Dili. One wasn't afraid to talk with visitors from abroad. One was welcomed into people's homes".

The atmosphere in Dili is volatile as well as chilling. Young people are prepared to risk their lives. The frustration built up by years of repression ignites small incidents into major protests. In the demonstration on July 14 after a series of what were seen as sacrilegious actions, eight participants were injured and there were persistent rumours that one or more are dead. Included among the marchers were the sons and daughters of several Timorese *bupati* (district head), a striking illustration of the way in which East Timorese from the most privileged families have become alienated from Indonesian authority. Students demonstrating on July 14 bared chests and taunted police to shoot. "You can't believe what it is like", a young man said. "We will never forget and never give in".

They are angry that the international community fails to act

while it claims there is a new world order underpinned by human rights. Many are bitter about Australian inaction. Australia's violation of Portuguese Timor's neutrality in 1941 and the consequent loss of 40,000 East Timorese lives from Japanese actions, is part of their history and living memory.

The University of East Timor has 1,500 students in three faculties, and staff who are enthusiastic about its role. It is a potential trouble spot for the authorities and is kept under close surveillance. Fees for courses, as in other parts of Indonesia, are around Rp1 million (AUD$670) a year.

Older East Timorese people in Dili have been traumatised by the brutal invasion, nineteen years of war, oppression, surveillance, and the shock and continuing anger at the cold blooded killings at the Santa Cruz Cemetery in 1991. One man I met lost three sons there.

The report of the Djaelani Commission into the 'November 12 1991 Incident' has still not been released. Many people believe that the true casualties are 271 killed, 280 wounded and more than 200 missing. These figures come from *Peace is Possible* a Portuguese human rights organisation. It claims these numbers can be authenticated by lists that have been rigorously cross checked and supported by research done by Amnesty, health workers and clergy in East Timor.

In rural areas

Dare is on the crest of the hills overlooking Dili. The road from Dili passes much of East Timor's recent history. First the Santa Cruz cemetery where the November 1991 killings took place, then the ruined stone house where resistance leader Xanana Gusmao was captured in November 1992, then the hospital now used by the Indonesian Army, which was run by International Red Cross in 1975 in the months before the Indonesian invasion. At the time ICRC wanted to continue to provide a medical service and shelter for refugees, under the terms of the Geneva Convention should an invasion occur, but Indonesia refused to agree.

The Governor's former residence where the cabinet of the Democratic Republic of East Timor was sworn in on December 2, 1975 is at Lahane. The Australian 2/2 Independent Company's pool and shelter, their 'thank you' to the people of East Timor for their help during World War II looks neglected, but is soon to be refurbished by them and supplied with water. An unmade road leads from there to Dare, a hamlet sheltering behind a ridge. Here, as in so many parts of East Timor, a new church is being built for a growing congregation.

The old Dare Seminary is a modest building. But its alumni include many of the most prominent figures of East Timor's recent history. They include Bishop Carlos Belo, head of the Catholic Church, Nicolau Lobato, the Prime Minister of the Fretilin state and leader of the armed resistance until killed in 1978, Xavier Do Amaral, first President of Fretilin, and Xanana Gusmao who emerged as the principal leader of the guerrilla resistance in 1981, was captured in 1992 and is now in gaol in Cipinang in Jakarta.

Two key figures of the UDT (Timor Democratic Union) leadership, Francisco Lopes da Cruz and Domingos de Oliveira, were also seminarians at Dare before 1975, as was Osorio Soares, founding President of Apodeti and brother of the present Governor of East Timor, Abilio Osorio Soares.

The seminary is now often used for retreats and meetings. The small rooms in the accommodation block have stunning views over Dili to the island of Atauro. The path down the hill passes the new Seminary, now too small for the numbers seeking education and a religious vocation.

Much of the country bears resemblance to the Australian countryside, with steep rocky hills and gullies and sparse cover. There are tall brown grasses, thin undergrowth and a variety of trees, dominated by the pale green leaves and silver trunks of eucalyptus alba. Further inland near Ermera there are largecoffee plantations with tall bushes difficult to harvest in steep gullies and shaded by huge canopies of 'umbrella' trees.

The country is ideal for guerrilla activity as the Australian Independent Companies found during the fourteen months they defied the Japanese Army in 1942. Armed men could hide nearby, even beside the track down to Dili where ridges command gullies and paths. The guerrilla bands of Falantil, the army of CNRM (National Council of Maubere Resistance), oblige Indonesia to keep a large number of troops in East Timor.

A map and briefing from resistance sources shows Indonesian troop locations. I was told there are 20,000 ABRI troops in East Timor under the command of Lieut. Col. Johny Lumintang who was recently promoted and moved to Bali. They include four battalions of 700 to 1,000 men in each of 'red beret' elite Kopassus troops underthe command of Lieut. Col. Sugiarto, 1 battalion of 1,000 men of Kostrad 'green berets' and 10 to 13 battalions each of 1,000 territorial troops.

The latter operate in *sucos*, towns or villages, in units of 8-10 personnel, equipped with communication systems and weapons and assist village housing and other projects. There are also 7,000 Timorese in *Hansip* units who have been drafted to serve in paramilitary activities and another two Timorese battalions each of 1,000 conscripts as well as police throughout the territory.

Along the coast the scenery is spectacular. The road climbs and falls around rocky points, river flats and inlets and provides sweeping views along the mountainous coast. Nearing Baucau it crosses a rocky plateau and heads for two white pillars. There is no sign of a town and only a few goats and ponies pick at the wiry grass between the boulders.

Below the pillars the road falls away to new Baucau, which looks like a new Australian mining town. There is a recent report of a secret underground interrogation and torture chamber built beside the runway of the new Baucau airport. Rows of large, new administrative buildings, similar to those in each of the administrative centres of the thirteen regencies, line the main road. The old town of Baucau, in the shadow of the steep cliff, has a large Catholic Church, built since 1975,

Portuguese market place, police and Government offices. Accommodation is available at the Hotel Flamboyan which has a nefarious place in the history of interrogation and torture in East Timor.

The police are relaxed and pleased - as in other towns - to have visitors, especially foreigners, to break the uneventful routine. They come from Bali, West Timor, Flores, Lombok and Java. Paid Rp 400,000 (AUD$270) a month and thirty six kilos of rice, they see themselves as being in a hardship post. Most serve in East Timor for five years. Some, after eight years of service, have a choice of postings.

Market places, cafes and food stalls in Baucau are dominated by people from other parts of Indonesia, mostly Javanese and Bugispeople from Sulawesi. The Indonesian military cemetery beside the road south of Baucau has over 200 graves. A fifth of them are marked with Christian crosses. Two of the graves are of recent origin.

Further inland the scenery changes dramatically, with small fertile valleys and some terraces where summer grass is grazed by ponies, goats and occasionally buffaloes. Towards the south coast Balinese and East Timorese have transformed dry paddy into irrigated rice fields producing two crops a year. The East Timorese benefit from these innovations if they are able to retain ownership of their land.

The road twists and turns, passing hamlets and huts scatted in the shelter of ridges, overshadowed by the massive bulk of Mount Matebian. The 'forest people', the guerrilla groups of Falintil, operate in these areas. Ma'hunu, successor to Xanana Gusmao was captured in a hamlet near here. Cultivation has crept up the slopes. Cover seems sparse, but on the other side of the rangethere are forests and caves and impassable places.

In many places there are unobtrusive monuments to tragic killings during the Indonesian offensives. We heard there of the villages which were destroyed and the hundreds of people who were killed. Local people and priests retell the terrible history of those times as do refugees in Australia and

Portugal. Some of their stories have been documented in Michele Turner's *Telling: East Timor* and Norman Lewis's *Empire of the East*.

Recently Bishop Hilton Deakin, the Catholic Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne, saw a number of these places, including the site of the village of Kraras where hundreds of local people were killed on August 21 and 22 in 1983, and the crucifix beside the road on a steep cliff that commemorates the dozens of people thrown over the edge.

Today, colourful mini-buses provide regular transport between villages. There is little other traffic. Occasionally a truck or small military convoy passes, with flashing headlights that order other drivers to pull off the road. Women and children carry heavyloads of rice and firewood. Rivers are dry in summer and water must be carried long distances. Occasionally there are men on sturdy ponies, some carrying handsome fighting cocks. At a bend in the road a line of people carry huge loads on their heads and struggle up a steep path that short cuts the long winding road.

As in the past, most families have a subsistence existence. Plots of cassava, some rice, poultry, a few pigs or goats, coconuts, bananas and small earnings from picking and husking coffee beans are the staples of a precarious economy, and along the coast, fish. The most common implement is the digging stick.

Livestock numbers fell dramatically during the large Indonesian offensives. George Aditjondro, an anthropologist at Satya Wacana University in Salatiga, Central Java, estimates that cattle numbers fell from 70,000 in 1979 to a low of 30,700 in 1980, and by 1987 had only recovered to 53,000. The number of buffaloes, 90,000 in 1979 fell to 15,500 in 1980, and was only back to 36,548 in 1987. Horses used for carrying people and goods and for food in military operations were reduced from 95,000 to 15,500 and in 1987 had only risen to 23,000. (Aditjondro 1994) The number of livetock are increasing but are still below pre-1975 levels.

To the south and east there are plains and more fertile areas

and always the foreign traders infiltrating market places. Women as ever do much of the work and many experience the sorrow and responsibility of widowhood.

Energy sources for cooking are a measure of living standards. In East Timor firewood is in desperately short supply. Leaves and branches are harvested to a level that stops short of killing the trees. Poles and firewood are carried in huge bundles, usually by women and children, and stacked along the road for later collection. Road stalls sell wild fruit, fish, and honey in wine and soft drink bottles. Panel boards used for cladding houses are made from the stems of long cycads, tongue-and-grooved, held together with long pegs and stacked for collection or sale on the roadside.

Behind Dili and in most other parts of the country, summer grass is burned to promote regrowth for goats to graze. Burning also makes food collection easier and in some places reduces the cover for guerrilla groups. Soil erosion, extensive in many places, is worsened by burning the vegetation.

In rural areas soldiers live in villages, wear civilian clothes and help with local projects. The strategy may win some support, but it extends political surveillance into every corner of society. It is a surprise to see that men in sarongs and jeans walking along the road are carrying AK rifles.

Uniformed soldiers are in base camps never far away. In some town squares, military parades with armed soldiers in battle dress shouting combat cries reinforce the authority of the Indonesian army.

Houses built by the Army for the villagers are hot, ugly and alien alongside traditional houses with cool, deep thatch, wide eaves and bamboo walls that allow air to circulate. The Army huts have concrete floors and walls to waist height, topped by bright green flat iron with gleaming galvanised iron roofs. The message is 'forget the past, this is the future'. Some of the new huts are empty, villagers preferring to remain in their old houses.

New villages with rows of army-built huts house families

resettled away from their traditional lands and form strategic locations. Some use *transmigrasi* settlers.

Two Javanese agricultural consultants planning a sixty hectare irrigation project near Manatuto, where, they said, military protection is needed, claimed that 25% of the land would be for *transmigrasi* settlers and 75% for local people, but it is expected that the proportion of newcomers will increase.

Bright, well dressed children throng the roads and tracks on their way to and from Government or Catholic schools. Although education is officially free, money must be found for books, equipment, examination fees, uniforms and food. The Oan Kiak Scholarship Committee estimates that there are a minimum of 4,000 orphans who are currently not receiving any education because lack of financial support prevents their attendance at school.

Tetum is now taught to primary students but most people have been obliged to learn *Bahasa Indonesia*, much as they dislike it, as the language of survival. A woman who had lost all her family, except one son, burst into sobs. "I hate it", she said. Greetings to foreigners in Portuguese are common where it is considered safe.

Health services have improved and many areas are serviced by Indonesian mobile health clinics. Malaria is still common and a doctor said that tuberculosis is prevalent, especially among children. In her area, an eradication and control program for tuberculosis was discontinued three years ago.

New roads usually built for purposes of military control, benefit some villagers, but Indonesia could learn from Australian Aboriginal experience that roads, health and welfare services will never be accepted as substitutes for rights and dignity.

The remarkable increase in the percentage of Catholics from less than 20% in 1974 to close to 90% today is partly due to the Indonesian Government's requirement that every citizen must choose one of five religions. More importantly, it is a recognition ofthe role of the Catholic Church in defending the

people and their rights. The Church offers comfort, fellowship, a belief in God, even if God's mercy may seem mysterious, and the courageous leadership of Bishop Carlos Belo, priests, nuns and lay leaders.

Economically and culturally marginalised

The people of East Timor are becoming economically and culturally marginalised in their own country. All of the first three Governors appointed since 1978 have been mildly critical of Indonesian rule but to little effect. A sign that the current Governor, Abilio Soares, is also out of favour was the appointment of Indonesian Army officers as district administrative heads against his recommendation for East Timorese appointments.

The greatest danger to East Timorese autonomy and identity are economic exploitation and the influx of new settlers from otherparts of Indonesia. Development is occurring in East Timor but with little benefit for the East Timorese. Tourism is one area where a shortfall against targets is admitted. The head of the provincial Office of Tourism reports all is not well. "The number of tourists coming to East Timor is less than expected. In 1993 there were only 1,400." East Timor's reputation as an occupied country is widely known.

At present there are no barriers to entering East Timor. Tourists do not require visas in advance to enter Indonesia. On arrival they are given sixty-day visitor's permits.

The province is administered by a large and growing Indonesian public service subject to army interference. Rows of spacious administrative buildings line several roads in Dili. They are dominated by the Department of Finance headquarters, in the style of a five-star hotel with a traditional steeple-roofed East Timor house decorating the portico.

Less than 20% of the public service is East Timorese, and the majority are in the lower grades. At the same time some 30,000 East Timorese who have completed secondary school

are unemployed. There are also complaints that Javanese living in East Timor give the local jobs to their children when they complete their schooling in Java. Some Indonesians from Java and other islands are sympathetic to the East Timorese. East Timorese studying in Java say they get on well with the people with whom they are studying and living. The army is the enemy.

There are two good polytechnic colleges. One is outside Dili. The other, at Fatumaka, inland from Baucau, was established by Father Locatelli, a dynamic Italian priest of the Salesian Order. Graduates with skills in typing, computers, machine tools and electronics have to compete with newcomers from other islands.

George Aditjondro describes the grip that companies have on the East Timor economy. The PT Batara Indra Group and its subsidiaries with close connections to the Indonesian army, control the coffee industry, including a 9,000 hectare plantation at Ermera, the main department store in Dili, sandalwood oil production and marble production, which is expected to grow into a major industry.

Eleven companies are interested in sinking 45 exploration wells in a seismic area across 52,000 sq km of the Timor Sea. Land is being bought near Tenau harbour close to Kupang in West Timor and work has commenced on new wharves for Timor Sea oil development. New roads being built in East Timor on the south coast suggest that Suai might be the location for on-shore facilities. (Aditjondro 1994)

Even in small business there is little room for East Timorese. Taxis, cafes, department stores, buses and shops are almost all in foreign hands. Four years ago 37 of the employees of the Hotel Turismo were East Timorese. Today there are only 11 and most are in the kitchen and laundry. The wage for an eleven-hour day, seven-day week is a little over Rp100,000 (AUD$60.00) a month. Senior staff at the hospital are from other parts of Indonesia.

Markets in rural towns and villages are increasingly dominated by new settlers. *Transmigrasi* programs commenced long

before the province was opened in 1989 but the opening meant that people from any part of Indonesia were free to enter and settle in East Timor. It is easy for newcomers to acquire land as customary title is often not recognised.

Low cost, mass passenger shipping services speed up migration into East Timor from Java. Three vessels now call at Dili each month. The most recent addition to the shipping line, the 2,500-passenger vessel *Dobonsolo*, provides economy fares for $AUD45.00 from Surabaya. Almost 1,000 people disembarked at Dili on the ship's second voyage. It is impossible to know how many were settlers and traders and no information was asked for at the wharf gates. Many were returning for holidays, including sixty East Timorese students studying in Java.

It is estimated there are 120,000 non-East Timorese in East Timor and the number is expected to increase rapidly. East Timor is attractive to the people of overcrowded Java and the adventurous Bugis people from Sulawesi. It is a closer and more convenient frontier land than wild and distant Irian Jaya and each family successfully established provides a base for relatives and friends from their home villages.

Many East Timorese are convinced that it is a conscious Indonesian strategy to encourage large scale migration into East Timor and young East Timorese out of the territory. They fear that a referendum on integration held in ten years could result in a majority in favour if some concessions were also made to the East Timorese people.

Universal opposition

There is universal opposition in East Timor to Indonesian rule in its present oppressive form. The most bitter people are those who believed that integration would be best for their people. Indonesia, they say, promised autonomy but betrayed them and gave them occupation instead. The remarkable nineteen year long survival of the armed and clandestine resistance in such a small territory is striking evidence of total

resistance to Indonesia. The guerilla force of Falantil has not been betrayed and has survived only because of the people's support. Its achievements make history in guerilla resistance.

Xanana Gusmao, the long-time guerrilla leader and head of the East Timor based National Council of Maubere Resistance (CNRM) is recognised within and outside East Timor as the national leader. CNRM was established in 1988 as a unifying, non-partisan body bringing together the East Timorese political forces, Falintil, and the underground groups within and outside East Timor.

Since Xanana's capture in late 1992, CNRM is led by a troika comprising Nino Konis Santana as head of Falintil, the head of the Clandestine Front, and the Head of the Diplomatic Front who is CNRM Special Representative Jose Ramos Horta. Horta's role in keeping East Timor alive in international diplomatic circles for twenty years has been crucial and is widely respected, nowhere more so than in East Timor.

CNRM has an organisational structure within East Timor, and in the 'diaspora' of some 14,000 East Timorese refugees who have settled in Australia and Portugal. There are now many qualified East Timorese in defined CNRM positions in key locations around the world. They include representation in the United States, Canada, Portugal, other European countries, several African States, the United Nations in New York, and the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

A Centre for Documentation and Information has been established. *Matebian News* is published monthly. Regular media reports are prepared and released through Portuguese and international news agencies. There is also a CNRM Human Rights Centre. Fundraising activities, grants from community organisations and some earned income from academic institutions finances these activities. The UDT and Fretilin parties still exist but they acknowledge Xanana Gusmao and generally support CNRM.

CNRM is committed to the Three Phase Peace Plan put forward by Xanana Gusmao in 1989. It progresses towards an act of self-determination in 7-12 years, when the East

Timorese people may choose independence or some other relationship with or without Indonesia.

The proposal calls for negotiations without preconditions. CNRM believes that, as in South Africa and the Middle East, reconciliation with Indonesia will be possible if the East Timorese eventually choose a relationship in association with Indonesia or independent of it. Indonesians who have settled in East Timor would be welcome to stay and to make a contribution to East Timor's development. Membership of ASEAN and security guarantees for Indonesia are also part of CNRM policy.

What is to be done?

The current realities are:

* The people of East Timor live in an atmosphere of fear and oppression and are economically and culturally marginalised. Within and outside East Timor they are well organised and more strongly committed than ever to establishing their right to dignity and freedom.

Internationally East Timor is one of the last victims of the Cold War not to have its right to self-determination restored. International awareness of this was heightened by the Santa Cruz massacre of 1991. That massacre was to the cause of East Timor what Soweto was to the campaign against South African apartheid.

Awareness is expressed through unprecedented international media coverage, renewed United Nations efforts to find a settlement and US acknowledgement of the denial of human rights to the East Timorese people. Portugal continues to campaign vigorously. The European Parliament strongly supports East Timorese self-determination. A settlement of the kind that has occurred in situations as apparently intractable as South Africa and the Middle East is possible in East Timor. Namibia, the Western Sahara, Eritrea, Kuwait, Cambodia,

Ethiopia, the liberation of the Baltic States and countries and communities under Soviet domination, and a recent willingness to talk in Northern Ireland, Bougainville and Sri Lanka provide precedents for an East Timor settlement.

* Although the Cold War which was the initiating cause of East Timor's plight has ended there are two new influences which pose problems for East Timor. One is the reaction of a group of Asian states criticised for their human rights performance. They argue that Western concepts of human rights are inappropriate in poorer countries with different, less individualistic cultural traditions. They stress the importance of community or collective rights. As a consequence Third World countries are reluctant to be seen to be 'giving in' to pressure on human rights. This is evident in ASEAN attitudes to Burma's military regime. Rights issues are regarded as matters of exclusively domestic concern.

Another factor is the subordination of human rights concerns to 'the main game' of trade objectives in international relations. This was proposed by Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating in his advice to President Clinton in August 1993. Recently, in Indonesia, he was reluctant to be seen to be critical of the closure of Indonesian magazines or to discuss East Timor or other human rights matters.

Third World resistance to Western notions of human rights and the priority given to trade by the Australian government are possible obstacles to movement towards a settlement for East Timor and need to be addressed in proposals for negotiation.

* Within Indonesia, the Santa Cruz massacre and the relaxation of news censorship created a wider awareness of the history and plight of the East Timorese. Many Indonesians and some Indonesian organisations are now committed to achieving an East Timor settlement. Various proposals for talks and settlements are being discussed in ever widening official and informal circles. This is a new and important political development. Reconciliation meetings of pro-independence and pro-integration East Timorese from within and outside East Timor are being encouraged by Indonesia,

though they are looked at with caution or suspicion by most East Timorese.

Indonesia is unlikely to relinquish East Timor until there is democratic government in Indonesia. It might then be possible to acknowledge that East Timor was denied self-determination and Indonesia had no legal title to a territory that was not part of the Dutch East Indies.

* In the meantime a settlement based on negotiations without preconditions is feasible. The concessions required of Indonesia to remove a serious international and internal embarrassment could be made without compromising Indonesia's questionable claim to sovereignty.

The starting point would be, as in South Africa, the Middle East, Cambodia and now Northern Ireland, public or private meetings with representatives of all interested groups without preconditions, under UN auspices or with United Nations representatives in attendance. Without this there would be no guarantee that negotiations and agreements would not be manipulated to Indonesia's advantage.

Indonesian viewpoints need to be considered. The Indonesian army might oppose such talks because from its perspective a valuable combat training area would be lost and the investments of Army organisations and officers threatened. These are trivial in the context of Indonesia's wider national interest but personal interests often have primacy in Indonesia.

There could also be opposition to the idea of possibly losing control over territory that can take increasing numbers of settlers from overcrowded Java.

A major consideration is that a special relationship with East Timor would create a precedent for other Indonesian provinces. The July incidents in Dili that arose from alleged insults to Catholic practices and people, draw attention to the Catholicism of East Timor. This is sometimes used to present

unrest in East Timor as created by the aspirations of the Catholic church, in a way that encourages the view that the West is only concerned with East Timor because it is predominantly Catholic. Even some liberal Indonesians say "what about Aceh, Irian Jaya and other human rights problems in Indonesia", if there are proposals for a special status for East Timor.

A response to this is that East Timor is itself without precedent. It was not part of the Dutch East Indies as was every other province of Indonesia. Indonesia's claim to sovereignty rests on the integration petition which has not been recognised by the UN.

Indonesia needs only to acknowledge the reality that the UN and many nations have not recognised the integration and that the UN still sees Portugal as having legal responsibility. There is, therefore, a real and growing international problem that compromises Indonesia's international status. It could be negotiated by Indonesia without conceding sovereignty or creating precedents.

The other concern, shared by Indonesia's ASEAN partners, is the objection to outside interference in what are regarded as internal affairs. However, East Timor is both an internal and international concern as was apartheid in South Africa and disputes in the Middle East and elsewhere.

The renewed commitment of UN Secretary Boutros Boutros-Ghali is the strongest evidence of the international nature of the dispute. The fourth round of meetings was held in May with Foreign Ministers of Portugal and Indonesia in the context of on-going efforts to seek "a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable settlement to the question of East Timor."

Also, although ASEAN countries object generally to the internationalisation and codification of human rights, they do not totally oppose it. It is not directed only at Third World countries. The human rights records of all countries are vulnerable, as Australia has discovered in the case of its aboriginal population.

But the more relevant answer to the objection that East Timor is an internal affair is that it continues to be a concern for the United Nations and a growing number of countries as was apartheid in South Africa. Indonesian interests would be better served by an end to this 'affair' than by sheltering behind the argument that East Timor is solely a domestic matter which it clearly is not.

Indonesia is sensitive to the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in 1995. It would like to achieve a permanent place on the Security Council and Foreign Minister Ali Alatas aspires to succeed Boutros Boutros-Ghali as United Nations Secretary-General. These and other issues relating to East Timor will be pursued by the 3,000 foreign journalists attending the November 1994 APEC meeting in Jakarta. International interest and concern is to East Timor's advantage.

A settlement of the East Timor 'affair' could be a crowning achievement for President Suharto in what are likely to be the last years of a Presidency that has in other ways achieved much for Indonesia. It would be a high tribute to statesmanship at a time when so many other seemingly intractable disputes have yielded to the ingenuity, imagination and willingness to negotiate of national leaders.

Australian policy

In some ways Australian policy seems still set in the 1974-75 mould of compliance with Indonesia to achieve close Australian-Indonesian relations. Prime Minister Whitlam proposed to President Suharto 'integration with self-determination' as the preferred arrangement, effectively precluding the independence option, as early as September 1974 without any consultation with the people of East Timor and at a time when their two largest political parties, UDT and Fretilin, were both committed to independence.

Acknowledgement of the failure of the Whitlam/Woolcott policy

would clear the way for a reassessment and a new policy relevant to the circumstances of 1994, one that would break the present impasse and assist Indonesia to achieve a settlement of the East Timor 'affair'.

The assumptions on which the 1974-75 policy were based have all been proved tragically wrong. Whether or not other options were feasible is irrelevant to consideration of the failure of the policy that Mr Whitlam made a personal decision to adopt without consultation with his Foreign Minister, Cabinet, Caucus or Parliament. Alan Renouf, then Head of the Department of Foreign Affairs, has written of this in **The Frightened Country**.

The policy assumed that the people of East Timor would soon see themselves as benefiting from integration with Indonesia. Today, nineteen years and some 200,000 deaths later, a referendum on integration would return a 95% 'no' vote from the East Timorese.

The policy assumed that East Timorese resistance should be quickly overcome and with few casualties. "Dili for breakfast, Baucau for lunch and Lospalos for dinner", was the reported boast of General Benny Moerdani. Nineteen years later there is still effective armed resistance that requires large numbers of Indonesian troops and police to be in occupation.

The proponents of the policy believed that the international community would ignore the violation of East Timor's right to self-determination. For a time, and in the atmosphere of by the Cold War, this was largely correct. Today there has never been greater international interest and concern. East Timor is seen increasingly as a human rights anomaly or aberration in the post Cold War, post Kuwait world.

The objective of gaining Australian access to Timor Sea oil is yet to be realised, although it is becoming a matter of urgency both for Australia and Indonesia. Both countries will be net importers of oil early in the next century, but Timor Sea oil developments are in limbo until the International Court of Justice rules on the Portuguese challenge to the legality of the Australian Indonesian Timor Gap Treaty.

The overriding pragmatic reason for Mr Whitlam's support for integration of East Timor into Indonesia was to improve Australian-Indonesian relations. For most of the past nineteen years relations have been little better than uneasy at many levels. In recent years there has been good co-operation on trade, education, tourism, technological, cultural and even trade union matters. This activity provides a stronger base for Australia to influence Indonesia on East Timor.

On hard, political matters Indonesia appears to still exercise moral and political influence over Australia because of Australia's support for integration, its prior knowledge of the impending use of large scale military force and failure to take action to prevent it. The Australian government and opposition were a 'party principal' in 1975 to what the *London Times* described as "East Timor's reduction to a state of vassalage which was violent, unethical, unfair and uncivilised". (18 August, 1993)

A recent example of Australian compliance is in the upgrading of our military relations with Indonesia. Australia has now offered to provide the military training facilities the US Congress voted down as an expression of its judgment on Indonesia's human rights record.

On August 6 Defence Minister Senator Robert Ray announced proposals for the joint Australian-Indonesian manufacture of military equipment. In justifying this he spoke of Indonesia's improved human rights record.

This approach on East Timor is supported by very few Australians. I have never met anyone who has not expressed concern about East Timor, even if they believe that there was little that Australia could have done in 1975. People regret Australia's role over the years and are critical of current government attitudes on East Timor. Concern is expressed through churches, human rights organisations, trade unions, overseas aid bodies and other community organisations. East Timor influences the perception that many Australians have about Indonesia. Some see the occupation of East Timor as a sign of Indonesian expansionism.

Richard Woolcott, Ambassador to Indonesia in 1974-75, was rightly concerned by the results of a survey in 1993 that found 57% of voters and 28% of legislators believed Indonesia would pose a security threat to us in the next ten years. (*The Australian*, October 30 1993) It is likely that much of that concern arises from Indonesian actions in East Timor.

However Mr Woolcott, now Chairman of the Australia-Indonesia Institute, went on to accuse Australians who are concerned about East Timor of being "noisy and anti-Indonesian". On the contrary the people who are concerned about East Timor want close Australian-Indonesian relations, but unlike Mr Woolcott they see Indonesia's behaviour in East Timor as a barrier to improved relations, and work to remove rather than deny this. Acquiescence does not win respect or real friendship.

It is difficult to understand how Mr Woolcott and other pragmatists in the Government, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Canberra academic world can fail to acknowledge that East Timor is a key obstacle to closer relations with Indonesia. Closer Australian-Indonesian relations require that the impasse on East Timor be recognised. Its resolution should be the central objective of Australia's Indonesia policy.

Australia still gives out conflicting messages on East Timor. Prime Minister Hawke, who in relation to Kuwait said, "Big nations cannot invade small nations and get away with it", was a strong critic of the Santa Cruz massacre. Labor Caucus passed a motion supporting self-determination. But subsequent comments from Foreign Minister Evans on the reports of the Indonesian Commission of Inquiry into the massacre went little beyond diplomatic requirements.

The lack of a clear position by the Government and Opposition is a reflection of a sense of shared guilt derived from having prior knowledge of Indonesia's proposed military action in 1975, concealing it and taking no action to prevent the assault.

In April 1992, when Jose Ramos Horta, speaking with the authority of the East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao, released his detailed proposals for negotiation to the European Parliament Human Rights Sub-Committee, Senator Evans rejected them seemingly even before his colleague, Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, did so.

The Government claims that Australia's close relations allow it to influence the Indonesian government in ways that would not be possible if Australia distanced itself and took a stronger position on human rights and East Timor. This view is only credible if there is a clear policy objective and a clear strategy. It is not satisfactory if all that happens is that broad human rights issues, including East Timor, are raised in occasional private discussion with the Indonesian Foreign Minister or if only passing references are made to the need for talks.

Senator Evans' recent statement that, "It is impossible for East Timor to regain its independence because this would create a precedent that could lead to the disintegration of Indonesia" (*The Age*, July 12 1994) was unfortunate and unnecessary. It encourages the 'precedents' argument to be used against proposals for other kinds of relationships between Indonesia and East Timor. And why the need to talk about independence when Xanana Gusmao and Jose Ramos Horta are proposing moves towards self-rule and autonomy to be followed by a referendum on independence, integration or another form of association with Indonesia after a period of many years?

Australia has been active on human rights issues but like other countries it is vulnerable in its selective interpretation of human rights policies. In some instances, especially South Africa,the universality and indivisibility of human rights is argued, but not for East Timor.

Recently there have been some changes. At the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' meeting in July, Senator Evans appealed to Indonesia to reduce its military force in East Timor and enter into dialogue with the East Timorese including the resistance movement. He also criticised Indonesia for its attempt to stop the holding of non-government conferences in Manila and

Bangkok: "Such talks could help resolve the vexing issue which continues to cast a shadow over Indonesia's international standing".

The government has asked that an Australian Consulate be opened in Dili but it seems Indonesia is reluctant to accept that proposal. It is not surprising that Jakarta would not wish to have foreign observers in Dili in the present atmosphere.

These Australian statements are hopeful signs but a resolute policy is needed starting with a commitment to the only process that can lead to a settlement... talks.

A talks policy

Australia's policy should clearly and unequivocally support talks without preconditions between Indonesia and representatives of all East Timorese opinion within and outside East Timor held under UN auspices or with a UN presence. Such talks would be justified by international concerns and could be held without questioning Indonesia's claimed sovereignty.

The East Timorese representatives would include Xanana Gusmao, who is acknowledged as the East Timorese leader in the way that Nelson Mandela and Yasser Arafat were accepted as leaders of their people; Bishop Carlos Belo, head of the Catholic Church; Konis Santana, leader of Falantil; Jose Ramos Horta, CNRM Special Diplomatic Representative; representatives of the Regional Assembly; young people and political organisations.

The release of Xanana Gusmao and other political prisoners and a ceasefire by Falintil guerrillas and the Indonesian Army would demonstrate the sincerity of the parties.

The agenda could include cessation of all guerrilla activity, withdrawal of Indonesian troops, a moratorium on incoming settlers, 'East Timorisation' of the public service, human rights guarantees, greater autonomy for the Regional Assembly and

a continuing UN presence. The issues and relationships are complex but less so than those resolved in South Africa since Mandela's release in 1990 and those currently being hammered out in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and in Northern Ireland after years of bitter, violent conflict. As Andrew Peacock, former Australian Affairs Minister said recently about Northern Ireland: "Talks in good faith can solve seemingly intractable problems". (*ABC News*, September 1 1994).

Indonesia's only commitment would be to take part in talks to attempt to resolve a situation that is a major embarrassment. Indonesia would be able to find good reasons if it did not wish to proceed with the discussions.

A firm Australian policy for talks without preconditions is very different from merely saying that they would be desirable. It implies that Australia works robustly within the United Nations and with other countries to achieve this objective. Just as Australia has in the past sought to influence South Pacific and other nations to accommodate Indonesia's interests in international gatherings, so it would now work to gain their support for talks on East Timor.

A principled commitment to East Timor talks would be welcomed by Australians. If a settlement were reached, Australia's relations with Indonesia would be enhanced because its people to people dimension would be greatly strengthened. So would the prospects of Prime Minister Keating's vision of a closer relationship with Asia.

I came home from East Timor with both despair and hope. Despair that people should suffer so harshly for so long, ignored by the outside world. The hope lies in the realisation that within Indonesia, East Timor and the international community there is growing recognition of these injustices and a movement towards talks that could lead to a settlement. Is it too hopeful to see signs that the Australian Government has begun to recognise the need for such talks?